

Jewish Composers Collection

S39/3

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# Meine Reise nach Tilsit, ein Streichquartett.

In dieser Komposition ist bestimmt etwas Autobiografisches, deshalb will ich so gedraengt wie moeglich ,etwas ueber mich berichten, um diese Behauptung verstaendlich zu machen.

Bin 1915 in Cranz geboren, lebte die ersten 14 Jahre meines Lebens in Tilsit, dann bis zum Abitur 4 Jahre in Koenigsberg und wanderte 1934 aus, fuer Juden gab es ja damals keine Hoffnung in Deutschland, seit 1939 lebe ich in dem Land, das 9 Jahre spaeter Israel wurde.

Ich wollte nie[ und konnte auch nicht] meine Exheimat (Ostpreussen)wiedersehen, obgleich ich des oeffteren in Deutschland zu Besuch war. Im Jahre 1993 schlug mir Professor Blarr, Komponist und Organist aus Duesseldorf, vor, eine Komposition fuer Orgel( vierhaendig) zu schreiben, die u.a. auch in Koenigsberg(Kaliningrad) von einem Deutschen(O.G.Blarr) und einem russischen Organisten in einem Konzert gespielt werden soll. Im Sommer 94 fuhren meine Frau und ich und ein befreundetes Ehepaar aus Loerrach nach Ostpreussen und nach dem Konzert in Kaliningrad(ich nannte das Orgelstueck "Freundschaft in K.") begann die Reise in die Stadt meiner Kindheit -nach Tilsit. Als ich die 2 Haeuser ,in denen die Wohnungen unserer Familie gewesen waren, wiedererkannte, erlebte ich einen Schock, der so stark war, dass ich nun schon 2 Jahre unter seinem Eindruck stehe und ihn durch dieses Streichquartett ueberwinden wollte, es war nicht nur die geschichtliche Tatsache, dass ich von einem Volk heraus gedraengt wurde, nicht nur ,dass ein anderes Volk dieses verjagt hatte, nicht nur, dass dieses verjagende Volk ,die in Ostpreussen lebenden Russen, von ihrem eigenem Volk so gut wie verlassen scheinen und in Armut und Demut vor den Deutschen Touristen quasi kriechend

leben es war fuer mich auch der Schock einer Reise mit der "timemachine"-zurueck 64 Jahre, seitdem ich Tilsit verliess.

Dieses-dieser Schock ist das Einzige, aber Ausschlaggebende, was in dieser Komposition autobiografisch ist. Ich dachte auch bei der Planung der Komposition an zwei grosse Maenner ,die in Ostpreussen durch ihren Geist die Welt veraendert haben ,Kant und Kopernikus . Und an das jaehrliche Naturereignis in Tilsit im Fruehjahr, wenn die vereiste Memel mit donnerndem Krachen in riesigen Eisbloecken unter der Luisenbruecke aufbricht, was ich als Kind mit Staunen gesehen und gehoert hatte und nun wie ein Symbol all der dramatischen Geschehnisse der Weltgeschichte die-

Needs New Grove and the Next Grove Edition  
Auch: Kompositionen von Beethoven 1986  
H-W HESTER u.W.W. SPANER

Edm.: Gullt kn: 1:6

DIE BETTLER UND DIE BEASTEN VERKAUFEN UND LOS BLASQUET MIT "ANNHEI  
VON TARAU"

ser 64 Jahre meiner Reise zurueck nach Tilsit erschien und wie  
der seelische Stoss , den ich dabei erlebte.

(<sup>x</sup>.. DER GESTIRNTE HIMMEL ÜBER MIR UND DAS  
MORALISCHE GESETZ IN MIR ..)

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Tal, Ehrlich, Seter, Orgad: Conversations with First Generation Israeli Composers  
Robert Fleisher

This contribution to the *Festschrift* honoring Professor Alexander Ringer is a variation on several leitmotives. The following pages, bridging the span of a quarter-century, are offered with admiration and appreciation. As all *Festschriften* are reunions--of teachers and students, of past and present--this contribution is itself a re-acquaintance with an important article on contemporary music in Israel, written by Professor Ringer over twenty-five years ago.<sup>1</sup>

This morning, February 22, 1991, the Israeli composer Ben-Zion Orgad departed from DeKalb after a visit of several days to Northern Illinois University which included radio interviews, performances of two works--one older, one newer--and talks to students of composition, music education, and "time," in my graduate seminar. Two reunions occurred here: thirty years ago, in the summer of 1961, my colleague Jan Bach was a student of composition at Tanglewood, where he, "Benzi" and Roger Reynolds were Koussevitzky award winners. I first met Mr. Orgad at his home in Tel Aviv twenty-five years later, in the summer of 1986. My residency at *Mishkenot Sha'ananim* ("Peaceful Dwelling"), a center for visiting artists and scholars near the Old City in Jerusalem, was supported by an NIU Graduate School research and artistry grant and a commission from the Ruttenberg Arts Foundation. While in Israel, I interviewed twenty-four composers, and twenty-two of these conversations now comprise an intended book tentatively titled *Music in Time and Place*. The reader of this *Festschrift* is offered a preview of this manuscript.

As a doctoral student in composition at the University of Illinois in the late 1970s, I returned to a paper on Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*, written during my first year of graduate school, for the subject of my dissertation. I learned of Professor Ringer's interest in the composer's life and work, and of his Schoenberg course, which he permitted to attend informally while completing my degree projects. Beyond the thought-provoking perspectives Professor Ringer shared in the class, our related conversations on specific aspects of the subject may have held equal or greater importance for me. Through my secondary emphasis in ethnomusicology, I enjoyed the friendship of another graduate student, Philip Bohlman, who has since distinguished himself as both author and editor. Phil generously critiqued portions of my dissertation and translated some writings on Schoenberg in German. After losing touch with one another during several years of geographic relocations, a series of reunions followed, leading to and including the present *Festschrift*.

I had been acquainted since my undergraduate years with Schoenberg's play, *Der biblische Weg*,<sup>2</sup> depicting the formation of a Jewish state under the flawed leadership of a personally and politically embattled "Max Aruns," a character combining the roles of Moses and Aron. Subsequently, through the *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute*, I learned of Schoenberg's interest in, and writings on Judaism and Israel.<sup>3</sup> In 1983, I participated in the National Endowment for the Humanities summer seminar directed by Leonard Stein at the Arnold Schoenberg Institute in Los Angeles, and later submitted an article to the *Journal*, which appeared in 1989.<sup>4</sup> Professor Ringer's earlier contributions to the *Journal*, in addition to other writings, seemed to me to offer some of the most cogent insights concerning the composer and his music.<sup>5</sup> I inevitably retraced his steps, and my own research in this area certainly owes a great deal to his

<sup>1</sup>Alexander L. Ringer, "Musical Composition in Modern Israel," *Musical Quarterly* 51 (1965): 282-97; reprinted in *Contemporary Music in Europe: A Comprehensive Survey*, ed. Paul Henry Lang and Nathan Broder (NY: W. W. Norton, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>Arnold Schoenberg, *The Biblical Way*, unpublished translation by W. V. Blomster.

<sup>3</sup>Arnold Schoenberg, "A Four-Point Program for Jewry," *Journal of the Arnold Schoenberg Institute* 3.1 (1979): 49-67. See also Leonard Stein, "Foreword: Schoenberg's Jewish Identity (A Chronology of Source Material)," pp. 3-10.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Fleisher, "Dualism in the Music of Arnold Schoenberg," *JAS* 12.1 (1989): 22-42.

<sup>5</sup>See Alexander L. Ringer, "Arnold Schoenberg and the Prophetic Image in Music," *JAS* 1.1 (1965): 26-38; "Schoenberg and the Politics of Jewish Survival," *JAS* 3.1 (1979): 11-48; "Schoenberg, Weill and Epic Theater," *JAS* 4.1 (1980): 77-98; "Faith and Symbol: On Arnold Schoenberg's Last Musical Utterance," *JAS* 6.1 (1982): 80-95; "Dance on a

work. These related experiences may have also influenced the formulation of my interview project, which combines my parallel interests in composition and ethnomusicology.

Phil Bohlman spent a considerable amount of time in Israel researching his outstanding study of the musical culture of German-Jewish immigrants to that country.<sup>6</sup> Before I left for Israel, he offered limitless suggestions, as well as names, addresses, phone numbers, and a letter of introduction to Hebrew University Professor Amnon Shiloah, a University of Illinois ethnomusicology alumnus who was a most gracious host, consultant, and tour guide during my visit. It was perhaps also through Phil that I learned of Professor Ringer's close relationship with the music and musicians of Israel, and of his frequent visits there. At some point I discovered the article with which Professor Ringer introduced a world of musical expression residing far outside the knowledge and experience of most Westerners. He described the unique influences of Hebrew cantillation and Arabic *maqām*, as the basic ingredients and inspiration of the music of first generation or "Mediterranean School" Israeli composers, by and large immigrants from Central Europe. I read the article with interest and learned the names and stylistic characteristics of these *halutzim*--pioneers in music of an emerging society.<sup>7</sup> A helpful meeting with him further prepared me to carry out my plans in Israel. I was grateful for his interest then, and subsequently, for his generous letters of support on behalf of the interview project.

With Professor Ringer's article, Phil Bohlman's list of potential consultants, and equipment for both audio and video recording, I left for Israel, where I spent seven weeks--mostly in Jerusalem, but also including stays in Tel Aviv and Haifa. Relieved by some sight-seeing, a Kurdish wedding in Beersheba, and a presentation on my own music for the students of the Rimmon School in Ramat Hasharon, my days and nights were filled mostly with interviews, and attending concerts, rehearsals, readings, and classes. One day, I attended a musicology conference at the Mt. Scopus campus of the Hebrew University, and one night, an enormous outdoor rally on behalf of the cause of Soviet Jewry, held at the foot of the hill behind *Mishkenot*, in the "Sultan's Pool." With a videocamera in lieu of a ticket, and the repeated proclamation, "filming for an American university," I remarkably gained entrance and close proximity to the noted speakers--including Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Shamir, Natan Sharansky, and Yves Montand--whose remarks I taped, along with the full evening of popular Israeli entertainment and the crowd in attendance, estimated at over ten thousand.

The following April, in 1987, with support from NIU and the National Foundation for Jewish Culture, I produced a concert and exhibition of "New Music from Israel," featuring works by composers whom I had interviewed the preceding summer. Several were in attendance, including Abel Ehrlich, one of the first generation composers discussed in Professor Ringer's article. Added to these were compositions by Israeli-born University of Chicago professor, Shulamit Ran, and her student, Argentinian-born Jorge Liderman, who studied at the Hebrew University before coming to the United States. Professor Ringer accepted my invitation to provide a lecture on the early decades of contemporary Israeli music, which was well attended and received, and followed by a reception honoring all of our guests, hosted by the Northern Illinois Jewish Community Center. This was the occasion of several reunions involving Professor Ringer, his earlier research, Israeli composers, and myself. A recording of the concert was conveyed by Oded Zehavi, one of the young composers participating in the concert, to *Kol Israel*--the Israel Broadcasting Service--where it has since been programmed on several occasions.

As I begin this paragraph, sirens are sounding throughout Israel, signalling the sixteenth missile attack launched from Iraq. Ben-Zion Orgad is scheduled to return from New York to his home in Tel Aviv later this week, and I am concerned for his safety. During his visit to DeKalb, he remarked on the "miracle" of the Soviet Jews recently immigrating in great numbers to Israel, where citizenship is

Volcano: Notes on Musical Satire and Parody in Weimar Germany," *Comparative Literature Studies* 12 (1975): 248-62; "Schoenberg and the Concept of Law," in Rudolf Stephan, ed., *Bericht über den 1. Kongress der Internationalen Schoenberg-Gesellschaft* (Vienna: Verlag Elisabeth Lafite, 1974) 165-72.

<sup>6</sup>Philip V. Bohlman, "The Land Where Two Streams Flow: Music in the German-Jewish Community of Israel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989). Bohlman focuses on several Israeli composers, including Josef Tal, in Ch. 9 ("The Immigrant Composer").

<sup>7</sup>The term is used here only in the most general and literal sense. For an interesting discussion of the deeper and various meanings of the terms *halutz* and *Yekke*, see Bohlman, 19-21.

bestowed by the "law of return." Recalling the urgency and hope of the immense rally held in Jerusalem during my stay, I could think now only of the sad irony, the paradox of their new-found freedom under siege, and the gas masks with which they were welcomed at Ben Gurion Airport. Upon his departure for New York, I realized the appropriate content of my *Festschrift* contribution: the interviews I conducted in 1986 with Mr. Orgad and three other distinguished elders of contemporary Israeli music--Josef Tal, Abel Ehrlich, and Mordecai Seter--all of whom were among the already distinguished group of composers whose work Professor Ringer discussed in his article over a quarter-century ago. These men are all unmistakable originals in thought and expression, and their music--each in its own way unquestionably Jewish at its roots and Israeli as a matter of fact--demonstrates a classic alchemy of personal and cultural expression. Although all four are of the "first generation" of Israeli composers--Tal was born in 1910, Ehrlich in 1915, Seter in 1916, and Orgad in 1926--none is linked with the full-blown "Eastern Mediterranean" folkloristic style associated with composers such as Paul Ben-Haim (1897-1984) and Marc Lavry (1903-67).

Joseph Tal's position as Israel's pre-eminent electronic composer, acknowledged by Professor Ringer in 1965, is a designation of continuing validity in 1991, despite use of the tape medium among all generations of Israeli composers, including Jacob Gilboa, Tzvi Avni, Menahem Zur, Noa Guy, Noam Sheriff, Joan Franks Williams, Amnon Wolman, and "kibbutz composers" Moshe Gassner and Moshe Kilon.<sup>8</sup> Professor Ringer observed that "Tal's numerous works for traditional media defy classification as part of any 'school,'" <sup>9</sup> acknowledging a variety of important influences, including dodecaphonic principles, oriental melodic sources, and biblical inspiration.<sup>10</sup> Assessing Tal's impact on Israeli musical culture, Professor Ringer states that he "exerts a far more powerful influence on the younger generation than some of his more 'successful' colleagues who intoxicate a gullible public with their facile 'Mediterranean' orientalism."<sup>11</sup> I interviewed Josef Tal (originally Gruenthal) at his home in Jerusalem.

#### JOSEF TAL

RF Where and when were you born?

JT I was born in a small village which today is in Poland. At the time I was born there it was part of Germany, East Germany. But I moved with my parents, as a child of a few months, to Berlin in 1910. I lived in Berlin, was educated there, went to school and the Academy of Music, and finished my training there. I started to work on my own, and then came Hitler and I decided immediately to leave. I came to then Palestine in March 1934. I couldn't immigrate as a musician because, according to the British mandate rules, this was regarded as a free-lance profession and in this country there was a danger of becoming a social case with such a profession. So, they demanded a minimum of 1,000 pounds sterling in the bank from which I could live comfortably on the interest. I hadn't any possibility to get this money, which at the time was a huge sum.

So I found out it was much easier to come here on a "certificate of craftsman." And just for this reason I decided to learn a craft, and as a hobby I always loved photography. So I saw noth-

<sup>8</sup>My first contact with the names of Gassner and Kilon was in Alice Tischler, *A Descriptive Bibliography of Art Music by Israeli Composers* (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1988), a comprehensive bibliography of works by sixty-three Israeli composers of the first and second generations (born prior to 1947), forty-eight of whom were interviewed by Tischler in Israel between October 1985 and July 1986. Entries are included for all four of the composers whose interviews are presented here. I had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Tischler (and her husband, musicologist Hans Tischler) near the end of her stay, and of comparing notes on our related projects. For another useful, relatively recent resource concerning compositions and composers in Israel, see Zvi Keren, *Contemporary Israeli Music: Its Sources and Stylistic Development* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1980). Keren focuses on common stylistic influences, and provides extensive musical examples.

<sup>9</sup>Ringer, "Musical Composition," 288.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 288-89.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 290.

ing bad to learn it and to do it properly. I managed to get a sponsor, to let me learn. I did it in a quick, very concentrated course in Berlin. This school doesn't exist anymore, but at the time it was a famous art school with a department of photography. They behaved very nicely to me. The director understood the reason I did it. The normal course would take four years, but I told them that I had no more time than a maximum of one year. And they all agreed to it, but they told me it's at my own risk. And I did it. So I came to this country as a photographer, and started as a photographer.

RF Why was photography considered legitimate and music not?

JT Well, photography was not regarded as an art, but a useful craft for daily life.

RF You would be useful and you could work.

JT And they were right. Indeed, I was asked for by some man in Haifa who had the money to put up a studio, but he wasn't a professional photographer. So he took me in. But it was also very difficult at this time, and I don't want to go into the details of this--it's too much. But anyway, I went to a kibbutz, and in 1936, started with the Palestine Broadcasting Service in Jerusalem. And they needed, of course, a musician--so I came over to Jerusalem and since then I have lived in Jerusalem.

RF You were one of the pioneers, the first generation of Israeli composers.

JT Yes, there were only a few professional musicians at this time in the country. It started then in 1936, when the Philharmonic Orchestra started. There was a big influx of professional musicians of all kinds, and this changed the picture entirely. Then they started with the real education in music, and all this had been before but in a very improvised, amateurish way--not really professional. But then it started seriously. At the beginning there was only a school for amateurs, a so-called *conservatoire*. And in Europe, Vienna, for instance, a *conservatoire* was also the academy, it's the same. Here they named it, like in Germany--a conservatory for the amateurs and academy for the professionals. These are just names. It started here the same way.

The Academy started about 1936 or 1937. I immediately became a member of the staff. From 1948 to 1952, I was the director. The Institute split into two academies, but that's really not interesting to go into. In 1951, I was appointed a lecturer at the Hebrew University and since then was connected to this university. In about 1966, I started with the Department of Musicology and was the first chairman of the department, for six years. And now I'm an emeritus of the university. I was also the director of the Center for Electronic Music. In fact, I was the first one who started with this activity here in the country. It was not so easy to do that, but I did it. Today, it's common for each university to have its own electronic music studio.

RF In the U.S., your name seems most closely associated with electronic music.

JT Yes, because I started that here. They make a fuss over it, but I don't do that exclusively. It's part of my general music activity. In fact, I started with electronic music already as a student in Berlin in 1927. They had the first electronic music studio, as far as I know, in Europe. There were wire recorders, sound generators, amplifiers--this kind of thing. It started with the play of overtones to make combinations of harmonics and to imitate an oboe or a clarinet. For us today, it was the most primitive way, but at this time it was something sensational. It thrilled me from the beginning. I was fascinated by the possibility of working with that medium, playing with the different possibilities.

Well, that was a start, but I couldn't go on because of the political circumstances. After our war of independence, I started to look around in the world, learning what happened meanwhile in this field. I found out that in order to really know what is going on in technology--it developed so quickly during the World War that I understood that I couldn't follow up here in this country--I had to go abroad to study, for which I didn't have the financial means. I managed to get a UNESCO fellowship for this subject, and twice I went to Europe and the States. I came back and founded here the first studio for electronic music with some equipment which, from time to time, developed, but was always behind because of financial reasons. But I went on and on, and today I am very busy with a research project on electronic notation for electronic music. And this is, of course, already in the computer field.

RF Didn't electronic music notation, such as Stockhausen's graph scores, begin simultaneously with the medium itself?

- JT Well this was, of course, very primitive. From any of those graphic notations and diagrams, you never could reconstruct a piece, never. At best, you could follow something. And this, in my mind, is a great problem, because the specifications are of such a high number, that it's impossible to remember all those details. For instance, imagine you would like to write a symphony by Mahler and you wouldn't have the notation for it. I'm very doubtful if ever such a symphony would have been written. So I think the artistic level of electronic music today has much to do with the lack of a proper notation. Because there are not enough criteria, or discipline, or references, and so on.
- RF **Many electronic composers work in the studio without scores.**
- JT Oh, sure, I know how they work. You go to the studio, you tune up, and you are fascinated--rightly so--by the sound. But you go the next day, and you forget at least 50% of all that you've done, and I've done that myself. I don't blame anybody--this is the situation. But I forced myself to try to solve this problem--anyway, to make a contribution to this subject--and we've advanced quite far. And I hope that at the latest, next year, I will come out with the first publications. And this will, in my mind, basically change the whole thing. My idea is to write the score for electronic music at my desk at home, and I don't need any equipment for that. I'm writing, and I'm going the next day to the studio and I can realize it because everything is written down.
- RF **An economical language--**
- JT Economical language, with still quite a lot of possibility of changing, improvising even. But a composer is his own interpreter, he has nobody who plays it. I know also from experience that equipment is developing quickly, and also the quality of the sound. The quality of loudspeakers is still very backwards, the other equipment advances much quicker. But I'm sure that one day the loudspeakers will be of a quite different acoustical level. And therefore, it's quite possible, let's say in another hundred years, that a piece will be reconstructed which has been written down today, and you will come much nearer to the reality as the composer imagined it.
- RF **But then wouldn't the technology be beyond the composer's own imagination?**
- JT Might be. There's no end, never will be an end, so that doesn't bother me. I can't see to the end of the world.
- RF **The director of the electronic studios at Urbana, Scott Wyatt, insists that scores be written prior to working in the studio.**
- JT Yes, he is quite right, absolutely. I am working on this right now. I am going on, as you see. I'll tell you frankly, the word "retire" is just a word for the administration, but not for me. I am much busier now than before. I never made a distinction between teaching and composing. I love to teach, because I explain to myself what I don't know.
- RF **And the students explain.**
- JT Good students ask proper questions. Nothing is more fruitful than that. So I never regarded an hour of teaching as a lost hour of composing--never, never. It might be that I would have composed more in quantity with lesser hours of teaching, but that doesn't bother me. I'm busy composing, I'm still lecturing quite a lot, and so on. I don't draw lines between the past and present. It's just a continuation.
- RF **What does it mean to you to be an Israeli composer?**
- JT Well, this is the very famous question about national music. You should know the answer from your point of view, as an American composer. What does it mean to you? I just looked at some scores of yours, and I couldn't find any American expression. It could have been everywhere. It means you are, so to say, a cosmopolitan, yes? But now, on the other hand, you know from your experience, you live in a society, you live in a certain environment. And, it's impossible not to be influenced by it, because you can't isolate yourself completely. It would be artificial to do so. So you listen and you speak, and you hear questions and you give answers. And, of course, you are interested that people could understand you, what you are speaking. And it's the same in music. Music is a communication. And if you communicate, you speak to somebody. If somebody can't make any sense of what you are speaking, then you are speaking to the walls, right? But music is not a language with words in which every word has a determined content. This you can't have. You can't say in music "please sit down." So we call that abstract, which is not at all an abstrac-



tion, because it's not an abstraction of a word's reality. It is a reality in itself. It's a different language. English is not an abstraction of Chinese, or vice-versa.

So music is not an abstraction of spoken language. It is a language in itself. It has its own grammar, its own rules, its own organization. It has its own feelings. It creates its own emotions as any language does. It has in itself both elements, the emotional and the discipline. The question is how can you make yourself understandable to a listener who hasn't known music methodically, who isn't a professional? Because over the hundreds of years, in music, certain expressions have been accepted as general. Let's say, for instance, major and minor. To have a funeral march in major--although there are exceptions--or to write a wedding march in minor, would be grotesque, would be something for comedy. Why is that so? What's the logic in it? Only because the interval of a minor third makes me automatically sad?

RF Are these responses the same in Israel? It seems that minor modes are so prevalent in the Middle East, that they are used for both happy and sad music.

JT Now look, you speak about Israel--Israel is a fact. The state of Israel is a fact since 1948, but the people of Israel are facts for thousands of years. So they are two different things. And of course, the people of Israel remember their past and in the case of, let's say, an observant Jew, sings old traditional melodies. Sure, and there are some--they are formulated on the musical language of hundreds of years before our time. And then, this was a time when the western music was consolidated into what we call classical music or romantic music or any other term for it, you see. And, of course, this became a traditional music. So if you go to the synagogue to pray for *Yom Kippur* or *Rosh Hashanah*, then of course you sing the traditional melodies, and they are close to the major-minor scale, or the ecclesiastical modes, and so on.

And quite understandably when we started here with Israeli music in 1948, and we started consciously to create Israeli music as a national expression, there were many people who said we have to write in the old scales--in Dorian, Phrygian, and so on--because they were regarded as exotic things from ancient times, which they are not so much, certainly not from the biblical times. So unfortunately we don't know what *Hamelech* (King) *David* really sang. As we don't have any notated music of this time, we don't know. So the Israeli music in Phrygian, or Dorian, or Lydian, or Aeolian modes, is quite European and anything else, but not Israeli.

Now of course, the big problem was to start something which is in the present and to disconnect it from the past which, in itself, is an artificial process. You can't do that, and it really doesn't succeed. Take today all the young composers, they don't have these problems anymore. They only attach themselves to what's going on in the world, as Japan did with regard to western music. Now what is going on in Japan, is it Japanese music? They are writing Stockhausen, Xenakis, Boulez--all that you find in ultra-extreme expressions in Japan. Still, they are going on with their traditions, and why not?

RF Japan is an interesting example, since one can hear vestiges in many contemporary Japanese works of the traditional sounds and instruments.

JT Well, this is what you have here too. You can take the old traditional tunes, let's say, and to quote them in your music, and harmonize them modernly has always been done here. Yemenite songs have been harmonized in western tradition. The question is, should you do that? I question it. But you can do it, you see. There will come a day when you will give a blessing to it, or you will say it destroys the melody. But, to do those experiments is understandable and I wouldn't just laugh at that. I myself didn't do that. I mean, I'm not above all that--I tried to make my own experiments. I didn't think that I shouldn't try that, shouldn't participate in this struggle which was just a humanistic struggle, so to say, in music.

For instance, my Second Piano Concerto was written on an old Jewish-Persian lamentation, which I found extremely interesting as a piece of music, not at all old fashioned--quite modern. I took out of the piece certain motives, and I used them as the basis for this piano concerto. Of course, here and there you can recognize it, and if I analyze the piece I can easily show this. So I made my own experiments with that, but very few. Actually, I don't think that a national expression ended with a quotation of old music, but there are national elements. And there is the behavior in the street, how the people behave. What's their morality? What is their degree of ag-

gression? And so on. And this is a nationality. This should come out in the music, you see. Because I live it, and I'm confronted with it day by day.

**RF** Have these elements you just mentioned directly influenced a work of yours?

**JT** If you start now to translate those things, then already you are on the borderline between language and music, common language and music language. Because to speak about music in itself is principally an impossibility. But I did it for many, many, many, many years--because I had students. I had to speak about music. And I tried hard not to speak only about music, but also to speak the music, which is difficult. But I think you can do it. At least you can manage to bring the student near to what you are meaning, nearer to what you are meaning, to fire his imagination so he can participate in your own way of thinking. But if you put me down to examples, show me, "here on page twenty-three and bar fifty-six, there you have Israeli music," that you cannot do.

**RF** You were just describing such general characteristics of what it feels like to be in a given culture such as this one--how people behave, and move.

**JT** Now look, I give you another example. About the same time were living three composers well known in Europe and their names were Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Not only about the same time, but even in the same region geographically. And they travelled quite a lot and they saw the same places, lived in the same places, came into contact with the same people. But what can you point to in any bar of those three composers? Only if they quote. If they quote the most popular behavior in Vienna--let's say there is a waltz--then of course you can recollect the Viennese waltz. Or anything else--in the German dances by Mozart, or these kinds of things. But take a piece, I mean any string quartet by Mozart or Beethoven, where there is no quotation. Even if you take the Russian quartets by Beethoven, the Rasumovsky quartets, well there is a quotation of a Russian song--but this poor song, what remains from it that is Russian in the piece? You just can't do that.

And this is what they always demand from you, because then you can write about it and you can speak about it. And it returns in each interview--every interview wants to nail me down to the Israeli motives in my music. And there is no question they are in it, no question. And if I wouldn't have decided to go to Palestine in the early 1930s--would have gone to London or New York--I don't think I would have written the same music. I don't think so. Let's say, from the technical point of view, the interest in twelve-tone music would be the same, and from this point of view there would be the same elements of twelve-tone music in it, or electronic music, or any other thing. This would be common.

But this is what we call today cosmopolitan. You can't change it, because in your TV box you have the whole world everyday. And you are not disconnected from it, so my environment is not only Israeli, my environment is absolutely international. You can't avoid it. Even if I don't want to do that, I have to do it. I listen to the radio, I look at the TV, and I read newspapers. I'm a normal human being, not a pathological artist, you see. So I am a member of the whole world, but I am living in a certain country which is called Israel, and very near all that interests us, our fight in life, our struggle in life. And this certainly comes out in the music, no matter if it is written for piano or for electronics, or for whatever you want.

I'm also of the opinion that the Jewishness in Mahler is in his symphonies, without mentioning sentimental things. He quotes quite a lot of Austrian melodies, quite a lot, and it is part of his Jewishness in this work. But if you know where he had lived as a young boy and what education he got, I think it's not difficult to make the translation, or to make the bridge from his traditional songs to his way of melodic thinking as, for instance, in the slow part of the Fifth Symphony--the famous part which became the film music for "Death in Venice," the movie which is built entirely on the Fifth Symphony by Mahler. And not so wrong, not at all. I don't know that they knew that consciously, but it's the same conflict--the same basic Jewish conflict in a different society--and all that comes out in this story in the struggle between two people. It was not so silly to take this music as movie music, it did a lot for the movie. And I have seen this movie several times, just to concentrate on the relation between the music and the picture. I did it just to study it--it's tremendous. Now this--you can analyze the music by Mahler in regards to his Jewishness quite easily, without any associations to his becoming a convert Jew or anything else. Not just the programmatic things, which you can immediately translate. This is an approach, an

- amateurish approach to tell stories, science fiction--but not the real thing. The real thing is really in his building of melodic motives, and to expand them. And you can see in that the Jewish quality.
- RF So his method of development in itself is Jewish?
- JT Which is environment, yes of course. Together. He learned his music in lessons but he was injected with all Jewish liturgical music. And this is crossing of two cultures, and out came something which became Mahler's music.
- RF What about Schoenberg--what about this question with respect to his music?
- JT Oh, certainly, certainly, no question about it. No question. The whole idea of twelve-tone method is a very Jewish idea.
- RF The perfection of the twelve?
- JT The perfection of the big role which a number plays in the life. A number which has its own mysticism, even without being mystical--but mythical. Myth is in the number. Later on they made mysticism about it. This is in the number, absolutely. So the twelve-tone music is anything else, but not mathematical play around with numbers. And Schoenberg's music itself is the best proof. Because there is no twelve-tone music with so many licenses as in Schoenberg's twelve-tone music. And to study why does he make a deviation in this certain place, from the twelve-tone method--why does he do that? Here you can learn the real meaning of twelve-tone music, from his deviations, and not from the words of systematization--this you can learn in ten minutes, no problem.
- RF Schoenberg wrote to Rudolf Kolisch that this is not the level where the aesthetic qualities lie. You were in Berlin about the same time. Did your paths cross?
- JT No. I met him, but I studied with Hindemith. Hindemith was at the Academy of Music, but Schoenberg was at the Academy of Arts. This is a different institute. The Academy of Arts is an institute like the *Academie française*, or the Royal Society, or the American Academy of Arts and Letters. This is different. In those academies, you don't teach. But the Academy of Music was not called an academy but, in German, the *Hochschule für Musik*--"high school" of music. Even today they call it that. Academy is a different thing. Schoenberg only gave master classes. But this is, in effect, not a school, the Academy of Arts.
- RF Those Berlin years between 1926 and 1932 seem to have been his most successful period, in terms of support and recognition. He had such a difficult time later.
- JT In America. Well, that was his destiny. He wanted to come here.
- RF I remember reading his essay "A Four-Point Program for Jewry," and also about his ideas for a conservatory here in Israel.
- JT Well, he wouldn't have been very happy here because the situation was way too backwards, and too primitive for him. Today it's different. Today he would have the means to build up something. At this time, it was very, very primitive.
- RF It sounds like Los Angeles was fairly primitive when he got there.
- JT But still there was money, which is a problem.
- RF There wasn't much, though, with his retirement on \$38 a month.
- JT Not much for him, but much more than there would have been here, not to compare. For America it was not very much, that's relative.
- RF When were you able to make the transition from photography to music?
- JT As soon as I could express myself as a musician. I started as a pianist. I started to give concerts at the settlements, the kibbutzim. I travelled a lot in this country. So, later it came out by nature. In 1936 or 1937, I was already an established musician. But the time I had to struggle with photography was interesting too, quite interesting.
- RF Have you continued working in photography?
- JT Not really. You can't do everything in your life. But I love it still.
- RF We were just talking about Schoenberg, who painted as well as composed. Did your experience in photography influence your compositional work?
- JT Oh, definitely, it has something to do with it. I worked also on a lot of experiments in photography. I was also very much interested in the chemical side of photography. I made my own developers. All this fascinated me very much. I think it's legitimate, why not? It enriches. And I was

very much interested, always, in theater. There was even a time I wanted to become an actor. In Germany, in school, I was already known as an actor.

**RF Have you composed for the theater?**

**JT** Oh, yes. I've written a number of operas, yes. And the theatrical part of my operas is equal to the musical part, absolutely equal. So, I saw to it--so far I've succeeded--always to have a stage director who understands that music and stage are not two different things but are going together and inspiring each other. This is a story in itself--and there are many very interesting stories from this chapter.

**RF Have you also composed operas with electronic music?**

**JT** Yes, I even wrote one opera which is entirely electronic--there was no orchestra. It's an opera on Masada. And right now there are negotiations. They want to make a film--not here--in Europe, and it might go on stage also in Europe. It was written for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the State of Israel, and was commissioned by the State. It has been performed here in Jerusalem.

**RF You just returned from Europe. Was your work performed on this trip?**

**JT** I will have performances next year in Europe, in the seven hundred fiftieth year festival of Berlin.

**RF You were rather young when you left Berlin. Does it feel like home?**

**JT** Not so young, I was twenty-three. When you're twenty-three, you're already a human being. Oh no, I'm not going back to go home, oh no. The first time I visited Berlin, I escaped--I couldn't see it. Because it was still in the state of havoc at this time, few things had been rebuilt. This was a nightmare to see. But then, in the course of my musical doings, I visited it again and again. And of course, today it is all very different from what it was. So, they commissioned an opera which will go on next year.

**RF Are there new interests or directions in your recent compositional work?**

**JT** There are always changes, always. I never go on with the same thing. I mean, this is part of our century. We all went through so many different periods. I still remember my examination to enter the Academy of Music. I had to improvise on a given subject in sonata form, on the piano. Franz Schreker--you may know the name--was the director then. So I played it. I was very strong in improvisation, so I did it with pleasure. And when I finished, he said to me with a certain smile, "Well, my young man, it was somewhat like Beethoven." I was impertinent enough to reply to this remark: "Herr Professor, shall I take this as a compliment?"

Composed in 1953, Abel Ehrlich's *Bashrav* for solo violin is possibly the single work for which this prolific composer (of well over a thousand works) is best known. According to Professor Ringer, "the title refers to a varied rondo form popular with Arabic musicians, and Ehrlich goes much farther than Seter in the use of microtones, as well as specific rhythmic patterns directly derived from Arabic models."<sup>12</sup> Professor Ringer also points out that the kind of "creeping chromaticism" one hears at the opening of Bartók's *Music for String, Percussion and Celesta* had become "a common stylistic characteristic of numerous composers whose artistic outlooks may differ greatly in other respects."<sup>13</sup> I interviewed Mr. Ehrlich at his home in a Maoz Aviv, a suburb of Tel Aviv, and had the pleasure of his participation in our New Music from Israel concert in April of 1987. He is the recipient of the prestigious Prime Minister Prize in composition.

#### ABEL EHRLICH

**RF When and where were you born?**

**AE** I was born in Germany in 1915. I came here in the beginning of 1939, after being in Yugoslavia. I left Germany one year after Hitler, after making my matriculation at the school, and went to an uncle in Zagreb, in Yugoslavia. And I studied violin there, which I left later, and came here through Albania in January 1939. I was thrown out of Yugoslavia as a German Jew, during the

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 291.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 293.

time Stoyadinović was there, the Prime Minister. Hitler told him "throw out all German Jews." And then I went to Albania and waited for my certificate here for Israel, for Palestine then.

I was in Jerusalem at the beginning, and studied there almost at once. I had a scholarship for Jewish music or something like that. My teacher was Rosowsky, who went later to the States. He was a very old-fashioned man, a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov. He gave me, almost with the exact words, what he studied with Rimsky-Korsakov or Taneyev, in counterpoint, and so on. And after several years, I said to him "good-bye," and he wanted to teach me further and I said "No, thank you, that's it." And he said "but composition--" because I had only studied the foundations, but I didn't want anything from him. That was long ago. I stopped in the forties, I think in 1944 I stopped with him. I studied since then to today--that is, going to summer courses in Germany too, to Darmstadt several times, and being very much interested in new music, which was almost unknown here.

RF How recently were you at Darmstadt?

AE Oh, it's long ago. I started in 1959, and have been there several times, in Donaueschingen, and so on. And once I was invited by the German *Musikrat* to be there in the summertime. But it was in the late 1950s and through the 1960s. And since then I have been in Europe and Germany too, but not studying there. It was a very interesting time, and I think that even at the beginning there were already cliffs and rifts between Nono and Stockhausen. It was quite interesting. It was a very dramatic time, it was really dramatic. And Stockhausen--I don't know about today, but he was very, very much influenced by Cage. And Nono was very much anti-Cage, and this made some interesting, dramatic things there. But today I would say a lot of things spoken there--not only taught, but spoken--have been quite idiotic, including the words of all the famous men who exist now. But sometimes I heard very interesting compositions. Stockhausen--I didn't love so much his compositions, though I was impressed. But I think it was very adventurous even to listen to his explanations, which were very science-fiction-like. It was really an adventure, for a man coming from a closed place, and Israel was a very closed place. In 1959, we didn't know very much--so it started. It was very interesting for me to know, let's say, how they didn't take anything for granted that had been taken for granted during the last century or so.

RF Can you tell me more about your musical training?

AE In Germany I learned nothing, perhaps violin. And in Yugoslavia it was very simple-minded, very traditional-minded, teaching of harmony and counterpoint, very dry stuff. I taught myself, but I think I learned a lot from other composers too when I was young. Today I wouldn't be able to learn from other people, but then I was able to--a lot from Webern. I was most influenced by him, more than by Schoenberg for instance, more than by Berg. And later, when I was a bit more adult, I learned a lot from classical composers too, because as a young man, I was very much for new things. I knew classical music by ear and I loved it, but I got so far away from it during that time when I started to try out how I would react to those new things.

RF What aspects of Webern's music were important to you?

AE I can say it now only historically, because my interest is not so strong as it was, but I felt at the time. I didn't know him in the 1940s and I knew very little about him in the 1950s, but I learned a lot about him because I studied his works in the 1960s. I had the feeling he was one of the most honest composers I had ever known. He was the opposite, in a certain sense, of composers throwing around their emotions uncensored, almost improvising--like Schumann and so on--I would say today also like Berg sometimes. But I felt almost a religious feeling to the music--"don't waste anything, you have to create music in other ways than go explode your emotions." This made a big impression with me, and I thought I wouldn't know whom to put into the same category--perhaps sometimes Bach, but not always. It sounds a bit exaggerated when I say it today, in my ears, but I felt this.

RF I think it's true. It was such a radical change of aesthetic to go from the emotive Viennese outpourings of even Schoenberg.

AE You know, it's very interesting to look back at it now, when one remembers he was a pupil of Schoenberg--and Schoenberg was a giant, and is a giant--and those were his pupils whom he criticized. And he said "they don't--Alban and Anton--understand what I mean." History will teach us something else perhaps. This influence is not very original, because it influenced almost the

whole of music--in Europe especially--and made very strange disciples. That love was very strange, because from this very economical stuff Webern did, they spread out, let's say, throwing around kilograms and kilograms of notes--Stockhausen for instance.

RF What does it mean to you to be an Israeli composer?

AE The last time I was asked was in Jerusalem when I was invited to the Academy to talk about myself. It was the first of June, not so long ago. And I must say, I thought about it so much--sometimes I thought against it, and sometimes for it. It's so far away from me that I can only construct an answer without really coming out at once. I would say today, let's say, as a general remark, the same which young people would say today: an Israeli composer is a composer in Israel, or an Israeli composing--including perhaps, an Arab, if he is an Israeli. I want to exaggerate what I mean by it, and I think that's the only natural way today to talk about it. Because even if I would have a credo, I wouldn't want to put my credo on other people. This is an awful thing, if one would do it, and it's certain that there are people who would answer in that way. And there have been always certain people who answered in that way--who use certain phrases, who use certain melodies, who are influenced by the oriental *melos*, or by the oriental rhythm or oriental color--but I would not say so.

I would say this: in the 1950s there was enormous weight given to that question, and it was not very helpful. You know, thirty years ago, in 1956, there was a composer, Yizhar Yaron, living in a kibbutz where there was to be a summer course. Partos was a composer and a violist, and he was a wonderful teacher for chamber music. And he invited me to teach during the seminar he intended to give at the Kibbutz *Ein Hashofet*. He wanted me to teach a bit of theory, like writing exercises. And Yizhar Yaron, who knew me before, said "let's try an experiment: teach Israeli music"--to which I said "this doesn't exist." It was in the 1950s, it was 1953 or so. He meant "try to." He said "let's not wait twenty years more and then, again, weep we have no special music--teach it." I said "okay," and first of all I took this famous *Thesaurus* of Idelsohn's, where there are very interesting old melodies from Israeli communities--eastern ones--and taught them. And I taught a lot of elements of eastern music I studied years before. Since 1939 I studied eastern music, not only near-eastern, but far-eastern too. And I taught elements of rhythm and rhythmic patterns, and multirhythms and *color* and *maqam*, and the principle of *maqam*, not only *maqam* itself.

When I arrived in *Eretz* Israel I went into the University and read every book they had about non-European music, and sometimes in languages I didn't understand, like Dutch--but I understood the examples. And I tried to listen to what was possible to listen to, and I was very much interested in Indian music, and in African music, and so on. And I taught a bit of that, and I started a bit parallel to teach--which I think now is almost stupid--I thought in Europe they started with polyphony and organum style, so I'll teach a bit of organum. And that was my course, and there were sixty people, and they were very interested. And I tried to teach them a bit of quarter tones, and so on, and we invited an Arab group of players from Nazareth. It was a very important time, I think, for me and for those sixty young men, some of whom are living now and composing. And I wrote then a composition which was very much influenced, I would say, not by eastern music but by the elements of eastern music.

RF Is that *Bashrav*, the work Professor Ringer discusses in his article?

AE Yes. Okay, I suffered a bit from *Bashrav*, because I was called "the composer of *Bashrav*." And after having written *Bashrav*, I left it. This is lots of years ago, thirty-three years ago.

RF How do western and Middle Eastern elements combine or balance in your work?

AE I wouldn't make now any theory, and I think I'm not stupid, but I have now no intellectual skeleton for my composing. That means I wouldn't try to define what's my way. I know that certain things from eastern music entered my blood, and I don't use them consciously, generally. And I would like to add that when I wrote *Bashrav* and some, let's say, spiritual children of *Bashrav*, it was not love for this eastern music, it was something else--it was a bit of a fright. It was some strange thing for me, it was something outside my life. It was some inimical thing and not a friendly thing. I mean when I composed it, I remember it was not a friend, it was an enemy. I remember exactly where I started to compose it. It was an old, dirty, Arab hotel in Akko. The whole night, there was, on the radio--I think from Egypt--one motive. And it was the beginning



motive of *Bashrav*. It was a dynamic motive. I felt it as something inimical. But I used in that composition, I would say, two things: I used the east and the west. And as the west, I took a motive my daughter invented when she was maybe four years old, singing about some old story by the Grimm brothers, about the three bears or something. She invented it. She looked at the pictures and she couldn't read, but she saw the father bear, the mother bear, the little bear.

I want to tell you something. As I taught those guests in that kibbutz in 1953, then I had really a credo. I said "I don't think that it's right to photograph eastern music, like folklore, and to bring us a quotation in your compositions." I said one should try to study eastern music and to find out elements, and use the elements again yourself, as you see them. I hated so much the Mediterranean style when I lived through it. I didn't like what Ben-Haim wrote, and what Mr. Lavry wrote, and so on. To say it exactly, I hated it. I thought it was sweet, syrupy.

RF But how was *Bashrav* different?

AE I didn't photograph anything. I took the elements--though when I listen to it today, I find it very oriental. I would never write this today.

RF Then the melody you heard on the radio is not there?

AE No, it was only two notes. I did it myself. As you know, *bashrav* means "rondo." The individual player, if he is not a percussionist, he learns it. He learns those patterns, let's say for a melody written in a very interesting rhythmic way, this means almost western--and suddenly an eighth is left out, or it goes in triplets, and suddenly it goes in quarters, or something like that. And let's say the rhythmic accompaniment follows that line and afterwards, the melody changes or goes back to something normal, but the rhythm continues repeating what was before. Always some interesting stuff going on--I won't say always, sometimes it's very, very boring. And I loved very much the idea--which is perhaps not so, let's say, characteristic for this country, but farther east or farther south--and that's polyrhythm, that means there are a lot of streams going on at the same time. And I know Berio was influenced by the study of an Israeli man--Simcha Aharon, a doctor in Paris--who came from Jerusalem, studied African music, and recorded it a lot, and found the principle that everyone plays a very simple thing, but he knows when to play. Berio wrote his composition *Choro* exactly according to this principle.

RF In his 1965 article on contemporary Israeli music, Alexander Ringer wrote that you preferred narrow motivic ranges, together with what he described as a "creeping chromaticism" similar to that found in the opening of Bartók's *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*. Has this changed over the years?

AE I don't know if it was right even then, because--he didn't know this--at the beginning of the 1960s I wrote a composition which was a super-serial work which projected some mass of notes in all directions, and not only in intervals but in everything. It was years after I did that, and tried to find my own way in serial music. I was very far away from that idea. This would apply much more to Mr. Seter in that time. But it was a part view.

RF Was your serial piece influenced by your experience at Darmstadt?

AE It was overdone, because I tried to outdo them.

RF What is your perspective on contemporary music in Israel, on the way it has developed or evolved in the time that you've been here.

AE It developed in a rather organic and natural way. That is, a lot of young composers have been very interested in new music, and we have quite a lot in our young generation who are very gifted. And everyone goes more or less his own way, not too exactly following every trend in the world outside. And I think there are anti-elements too, because the whole establishment in Israel tends to conservatism--it's not only political, it's culturally too. But it does not so much influence many individual artists.

But, for instance, our section of new music<sup>14</sup> is in the hands of our composers' organization.<sup>15</sup> And the composers' organization doesn't do anything especially for new music. But in the time of Orgad, there were always concerts of Israeli composers. And what I see now is a special

<sup>14</sup>International Society for Contemporary Music (I.S.C.M.).

<sup>15</sup>Israel Composer's League.

gift of Orgad--he stood up and explained a bit to the audience what they will listen to, and he did it in an interesting way and he didn't think of only to take very established composers. He took very young ones, pupils of mine who only just started. And there was a time when they had a very interesting idea--it didn't remain so--to put together compositions around a certain poet, an Israeli poet, quite good. This was very successful, I think it was three times. And now it's in more conservative hands, it's Maayani and Dorfman. Dorfman is a composer of new music, but in his style of organizing, he is very conservative. And Maayani is very much anti-new everything.

**RF** But Iranyi, who works closely with them, also a member of Acoustic 7-11 with Dorfman, seems quite an adventurous composer.

**AE** Acoustic 7-11 is another organization. It's a bit one-sided, because there is almost no evening without the music of the organizers, and this is a bit selfish.

**RF** Schoenberg set an unusual example with his Society for Private Musical Performance, where he did not program his own work for the first two years.

**AE** Yes, and he exaggerated, he really exaggerated. I certainly wouldn't be against it if there were would be thrice compositions by Galay and Dorfman and Iranyi and Shambadal in the Acoustic--but not every time. But that's only an aesthetic point of view. I have the opposite theory, I do the opposite thing. I don't do anything about it, about self-promoting. It's even perhaps a greater thing than self-promoting, not to promote yourself.

**RF** You said after *Bashray*, you really left that aesthetic. Could you describe your evolution since then?

**AE** Yes, I could describe it in this way, if I would speak about strong influences. First of all, influences were almost unconscious, when I heard classical music in Germany until my eighteenth year. I say unconscious, but I took it in and later I took in all music that was possible to hear. Then I was very influenced by eastern music. It didn't start in Israel, it started in Yugoslavia, where I had been for four years, and in Albania, where I was for two months. Remember, I had no equipment. For example, I went to the best singer in Tirana and asked her to sing for me. And they had beautiful music, much more beautiful than Arabic music--using microtones, and so on--really lovely, lyrical music. This I worked on while I studied Petersburg harmony and counterpoint with my teacher, Rosowsky. At the same time I studied this eastern music, and I broadened my knowledge.

And then it was like, let's say, a pouring in of new music in the 1950s and 1960s, and I would say that was the time when I was very open, listening to outside influences. And my development is perhaps very natural and very general and obvious. I tried more and more to, let's say, compose well. I tried more and more to use what I had, to become better, and this also not consciously. But I worked a lot, I composed a lot of compositions, I think almost more than all of them put together. I have now eight hundred fifty, something like that, that I've finished. And it's not a graphomania, because I like to compose. I don't like so much to write it down later.

**RF** Or to copy parts?

**AE** If necessary, but it's not always necessary, because I have not a lot of occasions when I can listen to my work. And I didn't leave off, let's say, the subject of my Israeliness or Jewishness coming through another door, and this was literature, poetry. I love very much Israeli poetry, and I went back and I started to know Hebrew poetry through the centuries, and this influenced me very much. And I composed a lot, without being a bit religious. I am a Jew, but I don't go to synagogue, and I don't burn bus stations because of the legs of some nice girl. But I've composed a lot of *Tanach* music for instance, Bible music. So it's the Hebrew language influence a bit, but I composed not only in the Hebrew language. I composed in Latin, I composed in German, I composed a lot in English, a language I love very much--to read, not to talk, because it is difficult for me. If you would ask me "How do you explain yourself today?"--I wouldn't know, would you? Would you know?

**RF** It's difficult. I wondered what I would say if someone asked me--and I think someone did--what it means to be an American composer.

**AE** Not only that, but "what are you?"--"How did you develop?" It's very difficult because you explain yourself by writing this note, or this high note, or you want this--



RF I guess when I'm talking to a composer, I can describe aesthetic interests or techniques.

AE I use everything, and I try to use more. I had my graphic period from the 1960s onwards. And later I had my verbal period--that was thirteen years ago--I mean, I wrote compositions describing in words, even works for orchestra.

RF With no score at all, or with verbal instruction added to the score?

AE With no score. And I tried combinations with explanations, and so on. And I tried combinations with different styles of writing the music, as an experiment--graphic and non-graphic, and aleatoric and verbal, and so on--all within one work. And I must say, there are two things I could say today about myself, which are not perhaps positive things, but to explain myself negatively. First of all, I can't, let's say biologically, care so much to do something which looks interesting--I'm too old for it, you know? It wouldn't help me. Let's say, in a dirty way to explain it, I try to write--if it's conventional, it's conventional, if it's not conventional, it's not conventional--it's writing. But I don't bother so much--that's one thing. The other thing is my interest in new streams is less than it was in the middle of the century or the middle of my life, let's say, because when I went the first time to Darmstadt, I was crazy with delight that there were such and such theories--not even music, but theories--about time, and so on.

Professor Ringer observed affinities between Ehrlich's *Bashray* and the "instrumental procedures" of Russian-born composer Mordecai Seter (originally Starominsky).<sup>16</sup> Despite Seter's introduction to Idelsohn's *Thesaurus of Hebrew-Oriental Melodies*,<sup>17</sup> Professor Ringer commented that the composer's "intensive preoccupation with Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphony left a profound imprint upon his basic musical attitudes. . . ."<sup>18</sup> Consequently, "Seter devoted himself at first entirely to vocal music, a field strangely neglected by the composers of this 'singing nation,'" and also placed a higher priority on "purely melodic considerations" than on the influence of "Eastern models" favored by some of his contemporaries.<sup>19</sup> From a more immediate environment, Ringer also observed, in Seter's instrumental music, "the influence of oriental monophony and heterophony,"<sup>20</sup> citing as an example, the composer's Violin Sonata. I am still indebted to whomever it was, probably another Israeli composer, who warned me of Mr. Seter's general reluctance to be interviewed, and urged me to keep trying. As expected, my first contact with Mr. Seter, by telephone from Jerusalem, did not result in an arranged meeting. I believe he was, at the time, involved in the recording of one of his string quartets, which would have been sufficient reason to decline my request. Patience was rewarded, however, and subsequently yielded an extended conversation at his home in Ramat Aviv, a suburb of Tel Aviv. This occurred shortly after his seventieth birthday, notice of which had appeared in an Israeli cultural newspaper, *Keshet*.

#### MORDECAI SETER

RF I want to wish you a happy seventieth birthday.

MS Thank you.

RF Where were you born in 1916?

MS I was born in Russia--not the Soviet Union, but Czarist Russia, one year before the revolution. In 1926, when I was ten, I came here with my family.

RF You went to Paris when you were sixteen?

MS Yes. I worked for one year with Paul Dukas, the last year of his life, then with Nadia Boulanger for two years. And I studied piano with Lazare Lévy for three years.

<sup>16</sup>Ringer, "Musical Composition," 291.

<sup>17</sup>A. Z. Idelsohn, *Hebräisch-orientalischer Melodien-schatz*, 10 volumes. (Berlin: Benjamin Harz [et al.], 1914-32).

<sup>18</sup>Ringer, "Musical Composition," 290.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 291.

- RF** You were still quite young when you left here for Paris. Were the five years you spent there the most important part of your musical training?
- MS** Yes, here I studied only the piano, because we had no one to teach music theory, harmony, for instance--theory yes, but not harmony and counterpoint.
- RF** When did the composer Stefan Wolpe come?
- MS** He came here in 1937 or 1938. There was Erich Walter Sternberg, who was born at the end of the last century, and he was here from the 1930s, I think, even before. But he spoke only German, and I couldn't speak German. Musically speaking, my education was in Paris. I learned counterpoint and absorbed the spirit, as I could, of Paris in these years--musically.
- RF** What was the most influential part of that experience, of those five years?
- MS** The study with Boulanger, especially the first year. The second year it became stifling, I couldn't support it. You see, she was extraordinary--there is nothing else to say. But she had absolute truths, and this was not good. When I first came, I accepted the absolute truth, but then I discovered that she moved from the truth--the truth became relative. But then I lost contact with her. Because if you are absolute, and the pupil accepts it, he believes you. When he discovers that you are capricious, it doesn't work any longer. So I finished my second year, but I felt stifled. I felt I can stay here no more, because it grinds me up. I couldn't suffer it anymore, and it was because of her authority. And she was capricious, because she was a woman. She was a mother figure for all the young generation, a kind of mother figure. It's very impressive.
- RF** So when you began teaching here--
- MS** No more absolutes! But I learned a lot from her. First of all it was her culture, her musical culture--it was enormous. She really knew the history of music. She really knew everything from Greek music to Hindemith and Stravinsky--it's about two thousand years of music! And she knew it very basically. She lectured about Greek music and medieval music, and we learned about the motets of early Renaissance and fifteenth century, and so on. And there was Monteverdi and Gesualdo, and we sang it. And she had a madrigal ensemble--they recorded it, with five soloists, and she accompanied them on the piano. It's a nice recording. They sang chansons with her, from the sixteenth century, and Monteverdi madrigals. And she played a few instruments, she played the piano and the harpsichord.
- Then I learned counterpoint, strict counterpoint. But she gave the essentials of counterpoint such as you can use in any style, the concept of counterpoint. And we learned from the chorales by Bach, and she permitted us to harmonize it freely. So it was a kind of composition. She taught at the *École Normale* for twenty years, and she also taught at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau. Dukas was also at the *École Normale*. I studied with him from 1934 to 1935, it was really half a year. And then I began with her from the end of 1935 to the end of the school year in 1937.
- RF** Alexander Ringer's 1965 article mentions the strong influence of Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphony on your compositional style.
- MS** That's right, because we learned the Gregorian chants, of course. You see, when I returned to Israel, I first met with traditional chant in Idelsohn's *Thesaurus of Hebrew-Oriental Melodies*, these volumes of different kinds of chants. And I discovered that this is parallel to the Gregorian with Latin texts. Because it was a parallel situation in a sense, not in music, but in a sense. And it was quite a discovery for me.
- RF** Wasn't it generally thought that Hebrew chant influenced the Gregorian?
- MS** It's of archaeological interest, it doesn't interest me. It was a traditional chant, from I don't know how many centuries ago. And it was crystallized. It was a tradition, with a Hebrew text, original Hebrew text, with an authentic Hebrew pronunciation. So it immediately talked to me directly. And it was not popular song, it was from the synagogue. It was a kind of recitative.
- RF** And Joachim Stutchevsky introduced you to these chants?
- MS** Yes, he came in 1938. All of those musicians you heard about came when Hitler entered Prague. Then Max Brod came, and Frank Pelleg, because they had to escape. And when Hitler entered Vienna, then came Stutchevsky. And when it became a fascist government in Hungary, then Partos fled from there, and Boscovich, who was from Transylvania. You see, when Hitler chased out the Jewish musicians from the orchestra, Bronislaw Huberman founded the Philharmonic

Orchestra here. It's all Hitler, you see--because it begins in 1933, when he came to power. So when I came back, Boscovich was not yet here, and Partos was not yet here. They came a little later in 1938. Stutchevsky came also in 1938. And Pelleg was already here.

RF Were Pelleg and Stutchevsky performers or also composers?

MS Pelleg was not a real composer. He was a composer of incidental music for theater. Stutchevsky was a composer and a cellist. He performed quite a lot. He made propaganda for Jewish music. He didn't know what it was yet, because he thought of Jewish music as Hassidic music, Hassidic tunes. He was educated in that. He was from the Ukraine originally. Of course, he was a Russian Jew, but he lived most of his life in Western Europe. But he had a few volumes of Idelsohn. I didn't know Idelsohn, but I think he died in 1939 in South Africa. Here there was no original music, but folk songs and pseudo-folk songs. Songs by Amiran (Immanuel Pugachev), or by (Bracha) Zephira. It's another generation. By Admon (Ididya) Gorochov. They weren't what would be called popular songs. They had their roots in a different source. For instance, Amiran is a little bit Hassidic, and Zephira is more oriental. And Admon Gorochov is more Arabic. They were inspired by popular traditions.

RF And they were the beginning of a nationalistic Israeli music?

MS Yes.

RF Didn't much of this early Israeli folk music consist of tunes of Russian origin?

MS Yes, but it was before this. It was before the first world war. Because most of the people who came in the first *aliyah* and second *aliyah* were Russians. Afterwards they came from Poland, after the First World War.

RF When you discovered these Hebrew and oriental chants in Idelsohn's *Thesaurus*, were you struck more by their similarities or differences with Gregorian chant?

MS They were very related--not in a direct way, but as an analogy. There were tropes, for instance, as you have in the Hebrew text of the *Torah*, of the Bible. There are small symbols above and below. These are the tropes. You have to chant it. It's melodic and grammatical. It shows where the accent is, and how it is to be pronounced, and how the phrase is divided. There were signs indicating that this is the end, or half-end--whole cadence and half cadence. So it's grammatical. And this was very important for me too, because these tropes were grammatical, and they were in tones--they were musical, but not personal. It was traditional, it was not the interpretation of the words as meaning, you see. It's not a *lied*, where you put your own interpretation to the words. It's a traditional basis, which is to be clear when you transmit it, and melodically and intonationally clear in accordance with the grammar and the color of the words, but not the meaning of the words, you see. So it's absolutely free.

RF So the aim was purely the direct conveyance of the text, the clarity of the text?

MS Yes, expression of the words but not interpretation of the words. This gave me the analogy with the text of the motets or the mass--the Latin text, or Gregorian chant--which is not personal, but it's expressive, very expressive and grammatical. This is the analogy which I understood. It's extraordinary, it's quite a treasure. I discovered a treasure, you see. And what is more, I was the one who discovered it, because I don't know who used Idelsohn--those who were here then didn't know Hebrew. I spoke the language and I knew exactly what it meant. I knew a little Hebrew even in Russia, when I was six or seven. But it wasn't new for me, you see. That's why all of those who came here at the same time as I came, or earlier, like Ben-Haim, began to study Hebrew. All of them began to study, and all of them were eager to get the folk songs because this was a melody and it was the oriental character, and it was measured. The Idelsohn one is not measured, because it's a chant, like a Gregorian chant.

RF So these were not the melodies that Ben-Haim or Lavry were setting?

MS No, because they could not read them, they couldn't appreciate them. They got a complete, already closed melody with such and such periods, and so on. And they went to Bracha Zephira and she sang to them, and they notated it.

RF Where did the melodies come from, that these composers based their music upon?

MS They're from oriental sources.

RF Heterophonic texture seems to be an important element in contemporary Israeli music. Where does this element come from?

- MS Yemenites sing it. I don't use much heterophony.
- RF Professor Ringer pointed out that your earliest works were predominantly vocal in emphasis. Later, in the 1970s, after writing a number of works for orchestra, you turned to chamber music. Is all your work based on this early vocal writing?
- MS It was the basis. One of the examples from my music included in Ringer's article comes from chant. It's in my Sonata for Two Violins. It comes from chanting, because it's vocal.
- RF Professor Ringer mentioned the absence of skips in your music at the time, your preference for narrow motivic ranges. Is this still characteristic of your writing?
- MS Afterwards, I left it. But the root of it is vocal, and it's always melodic--not vertical, but linear, contrapuntal.
- RF Why, in 1978, did you revise your orchestral piece, Midnight Vigil, which won the Prix d'Italia in 1963?
- MS I corrected some of the orchestration, that's all. Because it didn't satisfy me, because it was not what I wanted. I changed it several times.
- RF You have also written music for dance, for the Inbal Dance Company and others?
- MS Yes, I worked with Inbal. I have written two ballets for Inbal, for Sara Levi-Tanai, the artistic director. One of these was the Midnight Vigil. It was a ballet of fourteen minutes, and it became an oratorio of forty-three. I absorbed the gesture of the dance of the Yemenites--the Yemenite dancing and the atmosphere--which is quite extraordinary. I also wrote two ballets for Martha Graham, and a ballet for Rina Sheinfeld, The Daughter of Jeptha.
- RF That's when you were in the States?
- MS I went there in 1979 when I had a sabbatical year. I visited music schools, I went to New York, Washington and Boston. And then I went to Europe. But that visit had nothing to do with Martha Graham. This contact was in 1962, 1963.
- RF And you wrote for her company?
- MS Yes, two works, The Legend of Judith and another ballet which she called Part Dream, Part Real.
- RF What kind of relationship exists in your own work between western and oriental or Middle Eastern elements?
- MS There is always a change, but oriental elements go inner, and less and less may I distinguish between something oriental and non-oriental. Because it became personal. Now it has become my personal style, you see, so I can't distinguish them already.
- RF By "inner," do you mean farther below surface hearing? Does the oriental element remain below the audible level?
- MS Yes.
- RF Is the oriental element simply the idea of borrowing a melody, or a scale?
- MS No. It's all long ago. It began as a language, a kind of a language.
- RF Integrating the western and oriental?
- MS And even more. It is between west and oriental, and between myself and traditional, you see? It's very mixed, I can't separate them. Because, it's already--it's mixed, it's like a language.
- RF Can you recall how this language evolved, over thirty or forty years?
- MS You can't, because I am in evolution, I am involved. You see, it's like a flow of water. You can't separate water, it's a whole. You can't divide the flowing, because it's a unity. I can't separate it. I can't see myself evolved, because you are part of the evolution. You can't analyze it.
- RF You came back here in 1937, after completing your training in France. Did you begin teaching at the Academy then?
- MS No, there was a conservatory which exists no more, and I taught theory there. And I met Stutchevsky, and he had organized a series of concerts of Jewish music in Tel Aviv in *Beit Brenner*. He didn't commission me because he had no money, but I participated.
- RF Were you affected in the thirties and forties by the strongly nationalistic trends associated with Ben-Haim, Lavry and others? Were you caught up in this?
- MS No, not at all. Because they had a manner--it's superficial, a certain color. It's "Israel" Israeli music. I was not interested in color, I was interested in expression--not in songs, not in folk songs, but in tradition and in language and so on. And especially--I wrote motets for instance, on

psalm texts, taking the *cantus firmus* from Idelsohn. I worked with *cantus firmus*. It's another thing which I learned from Nadia Boulanger.

RF Some Israeli composers, like Partos and Boscovich, were attracted to the twelve-tone method of composition. Were you ever interested in this approach?

MS No.

RF You described the use of what you called a "private mode," in the string quartet you composed in 1976. Did you also utilize retrograde and inversion forms?

MS Yes, but freely. It's not a serial work, it's not a row.

RF So you break it apart and fragment it?

MS Right, because I looked for something basic and not a row, because a row is not basic--it's too organized, already too organized. What I looked for was something elementary, like a mode, like tonality. But today tonality is not acceptable for me. I was never tonal, always modal. So, all my life, all my compositional life, I worked with modes, with different aspects of modes--for instance, in the *Sabbath Cantata*, composed in 1940. The modes are given. They are close to Gregorian chants, the modes--I mean, Dorian, or Phrygian, and so on. But even there, one of them is not such a single mode, but it's oriental and it gives some suggestion of a kind of *maqāmāt*. It still has its tonic, but the mode does not have seven tones, but rather ten or eleven tones. So it gives a special atmosphere and it's not oriental in the cheap way. It's oriental in the inner way, like Indian ragas, and so on, but not songs. The songs make it cheap and vulgar. So there is the possibility of shade--shade and light modality.

RF That are the unique property of the modal basis?

MS Yes, it gives a different illumination of things. I think I succeeded in bringing it out harmonically. You can hear it.

RF It's interesting to me that you use the metaphor of shade and light to describe the mode, because one of the most striking things a visitor notices here is the light, and the color of the hills. It is unlike anywhere else.

MS The transparent sky. Most of the year it is blue. This year there was no winter, it was very mild. There were no rains. Sometimes it snows in Jerusalem, but even here at the seaport, there was no rain.

RF The term "Israeli composer" seems to have meant something very particular forty years ago. What does it mean to you now to be an Israeli composer?

MS I think that today the outsider sees better than those who are involved. He can tell you what the connecting links are between different personalities--the links which exist, if they do, or do not. He can see them better and he can say what makes it Israeli. Because if I speak of myself, I can't distinguish it or separate it. With all organic processes, you cannot disengage from the flowing of the process. The process is a flowing because when it stops flowing, it's dead.

RF Just as when the rules overcame the creative process with Boulanger?

MS Yes, it must flow all the time you are living, and composing. You are in the flow, and you can't separate it. Because if you see the flow, you are there no more. You can't compose self-consciously.

RF So, although you are a composer and an Israeli, the combination does not imply an obligation or a necessity to do a particular thing?

MS It's simply a fact. It's not political, it's not nationalist. All these things are exterior. You see, today you may be a nationalist, tomorrow you may be an internationalist--you can change it as you change your clothes. But I believe you can't change yourself.

RF It seems a common characteristic among Israeli composers to draw inspiration from the Hebrew or Yiddish languages, from biblical stories, or even a particular site, such as the Dead Sea--for example, the Hebrew language patterns which have influenced Ben-Zion Orgad's work.

MS But this is not characteristic--excuse me for telling you--because this could be on every point of the world. It could be in Switzerland, with Bloch, who wrote Psalms in Hebrew, I think. It could be in America.

RF So a Jewish composer is not necessarily the same thing as an Israeli composer?

- MS Yes, the biblical language and the Hebrew language and the liturgical chants--you could live in Honolulu or in the south, but you would not be an Israeli composer. It's a component of very many different things, not only musical things, but mentality and the general atmosphere and general fate. All of us Israelis have a general fate which is one, which is not a general Jewish fate. It's another fate. It's political--that's the expression of it--but it's an inner fate which is quite different from every other Jewish community elsewhere. And all these components plus music and personal expression, the digestion of all this--then you become, in my opinion, an Israeli composer. You want to analyze--try, try to analyze. You can't separate all this--we are built of all this.
- RF Josef Tal says that television connects him immediately with the world at large, but the life which he directly experiences exerts its own distinct influence.
- MS You can be everywhere you want. But where you live, you are not a tourist. And your emotional experience is what happens here, and not in Honolulu. In Honolulu, you can follow with your television, but not emotionally. No, it's not real. You have to experience it really.
- RF Many composers here consciously write in a western style. Some of them are inspired by biblical stories or things like that, and others look to the musical traditions here for roots.
- MS It's very complicated, but it's very simple too. I am the roots--I am sorry to express myself in such a vulgar way. Everyone looks for his roots, but I am my roots here. That is simple. I do not know how to express it, because I can't explain it.
- RF You just said that wherever you are is the reality of your experience.
- MS Yes, and then you can judge with this experience comparatively. You can judge what happens to Honolulu from your point of view, because you have a separate point of view--a specific point of view of the land you live in.
- RF You spent your first ten years in Russia, the next six here, then five in Paris. Did these early experiences compete with each other in your musical evolution?
- MS I'm not aware of it. It's your duty to discover it, I can't. Probably, probably, but it's all merged, you see. I came nearly fifty years ago, returned from Paris in 1937. So during these forty-nine years, all which boiled and happened here, it happened. These fifty years are at least--I don't know--for Jews it counts in centuries, not one century. Because you can't imagine the difference of the new country and new state. It's the unique experience of the last two thousand years, you see. It's not propaganda, it's a fact.
- RF You never thought about leaving Israel?
- MS No, of course not. I'm part of it. Maybe I don't like the government, this government.
- RF We have our scandals too.
- MS Yes, of course.
- RF One of the most distressing things for a visitor like myself to see here is the orthodox and secular Israelis fighting with each other.
- MS Oh, it's awful, it's awful. It's simply awful. But it's your place, it's your people, so you have to suffer. You have no other choice. No other choice--and an inner choice--not choice of possibilities, not technical choice.
- RF You have taught for most of the nearly fifty years you have been here since 1937. Do you still teach at the Academy in Tel Aviv?
- MS No, I stopped two years ago. I had another sabbatical year, so I stopped teaching two years ago. Fifty years is quite enough.
- RF I have the impression you must have enjoyed it.
- MS Absolutely, absolutely.
- RF What would you say about your most recent work, what is it you think about?
- MS I don't think about it--I compose.
- RF Have you any new interests in recent years as a composer?
- MS Since 1966, I have discovered the idea of a mode--I can show you the mode in this symphony called Jerusalem, inspired by the Six Days War.
- RF This mode contains only whole and half steps--no augmented seconds, which are sometimes used to evoke middle-eastern musical traditions.
- MS It has other things. It has augmented unisons.

RF B-flat to B-sharp, and A-flat to A-sharp.

MS Yes, there is a pentachord. It's arranged as a group of pentachords. And you see, here it is used, that the mode is used--it begins with this note. It goes there to A. I write it simply here as A-sharp because it's easier for them to sing, but it goes to A.

RF Is this also based on the chants?

MS Free--chanting is the idea.

RF But the idea of repeating the same tones, psalm tones.

MS All this, you see, is the other pentachord.

RF What do you feel about the contemporary music in Israel?

MS Before I answer this one, I want to tell you I feel, and I guess other Israelis feel--those who stay here--a little bit like the Englishmen in England. They complain about the weather all the time. They complain about the fog, and the rains, but they stay there. All the same, they don't go abroad. Contemporary music in Israel is in a way a simple question, and really not so simple. Because what do you call contemporary, what is composed now? There are several trends, many trends, but I think--what generation? Because there is Tal--working hard, composing operas, and he's seventy-five. He always was a dodecaphonic composer, from the beginning. When he came to Israel he was already writing twelve-tone music, and then he wrote electronic music. And there is the middle generation, like Avni, and Orgad--Avni more than Orgad, because Orgad belongs to the former. And there is the young generation, men and women of about thirty. And generally, I think, they all look at what is done abroad. And they are afraid to be late, to miss it--to miss the train and to miss the latest, what do you call, the "*dernier cri*?" And they don't understand that they are chronically late. Because when it comes here, it's already changed there. So they can't catch it, it's a train which always runs late. And when they catch the latest thing, it's already dead. Perhaps this is why some Israeli composers go abroad, to catch the train.

RF

MS To learn the latest, yes.

RF Several students from the Jerusalem Rubin Academy have gone to the University of Pennsylvania. Betty Olivero studied with Berio in Italy and stayed there.

MS Yes, I know. I knew a young man who came from Berio, who was disillusioned completely. Berio was simply not interested in him. I feel that much of this music is artificial. It's not from here, not from there, and not from here [touching his heart], never from here. But it's pretentious, it has pretensions to be modern and to be the latest fashion. But there are musicians who are not impressed or influenced--I think Tal probably, because he developed his way as he developed, and now he enriches his work with new language or with new discoveries, and so on. Because he also stays in the mainstream.

For myself, I never ran after anything. So I developed as I developed. I cannot see myself as a modern composer, because what I do is not classic, it's not romantic. I do what I feel, that's all. If I discover my way, like a way of working with different modes and material, and so on--it's my way. There are even composers writing in a new Ben-Haim style, a renewed Ben-Haim style, and I don't know what for--what for? Maayani was a pupil of Ben-Haim--he still does this. I don't know why, I just don't know. Because you can't--you have to evolve, and evolution is personal. It is not that you learn different things, that's not evolution--it's the evolution of others, or of general culture. But personal evolution is personal--I mean what I write today, I could not write years ago. For instance, this one--today I would not write it. I feel it, but I feel it as an old idea.

RF If there's no evolution, then one is manufacturing rather than composing.

MS Yes, yes. You have to evolve, but you can't evolve consciously. This is the problem. You can't say "I must evolve." Very well, but how, how do you evolve? By using new tricks, by using tricks? It's not your evolution--evolution is personal. Composition is a personal thing. I didn't discover it--it's the truth.

RF And this is absolute?

MS Absolute. You have to be yourself, and you have to evolve from yourself. There is no other who can do it for you. It's like love.

RF Like love? I thought you said it's like life.

MS Like life and like love.



Professor Ringer attributed the special emphasis, among Israeli composers, upon compositions for solo string instruments to an "obvious fascination exerted upon the Israelis by Near-Eastern monophonic and heterophonic music."<sup>21</sup> Among those mentioned in this regard are the late Oedoen Partos, a pupil of Bartók, Yehoshua Lakner, and Ben-Zion Orgad (originally Büschel), whose *Monologue* for viola solo is cited as an example. Already clearly in evidence was Orgad's interest in "cantillation and prosody of the Hebrew language"<sup>22</sup> as a musical resource, a focus which has continued undiminished to the present, and is, of course, closely connected to the soloistic-monophonic emphasis which Professor Ringer observed to be a common interest among Israeli composers at the time.

Another important characteristic of Orgad's music, in my view, is what might be described as an Ivesian polyphony, an accumulated density of sound within which one may detect discrete and disparate components--coexisting, but not sympathetically. Perhaps an element which evolved in later years, one is tempted to look, for its source, to the social and environmental conditions of Israeli life, rather than to purely musical causes, an interpretation which would be consistent with Mr. Orgad's response to my related question.

Professor Ringer argued that the composer's *Seven Variations on C*, dedicated to his teacher at Brandeis, the late Irving Fine, "clearly shows the drastic effects of this sudden contact with advanced Western idioms rarely heard in Israel."<sup>23</sup> Although wider intervals may indeed be in evidence here, the motivic gestures themselves are still highly evocative of, and closely related to those found in his other works, and, as the composer himself has suggested, the work still "brings to mind the melodic patterns of Bible cantillation."<sup>24</sup> We were fortunate during Mr. Orgad's stay in DeKalb to be able to present two performances of this work, by a young pianist, Nadia Nehama Weintraub, who was born in New York City and immigrated with her family to Israel at the age of seven. As she has known Mr. Orgad since her youth, their recent visits to DeKalb provided for yet another reunion.

I interviewed Mr. Orgad at his home in Tel Aviv. Mr. Orgad's special interest in time--musical, poetic, and other--had left a strong impression on me at our first meeting. At the end of our conversation, I requested a second visit, not for the purpose of continuing the interview *per se*, but to speak more informally about this and other common interests--including spatial arrangement and movement of sound in our compositions.

#### BEN-ZION ORGAD

**RF** When and where were you born?

**BO** I was born in Germany in 1926. I came here to Tel Aviv in 1933 when the Nazis took over.

**RF** What were your most important early musical experiences, and in your training?

**BO** Well, I started to play the violin, and I just loved to play, sing and listen to music, mainly classical. I think I started to compose very early, I must have been about nine years old. And then I took a course in the theory of music, and things connected. And then later on, I think it was when I was about fourteen, I became a pupil of Paul Ben-Haim. I stayed with him until almost 1945. If you know the years 1940 to 1945, these were very crucial years around the world. I went on studying violin with a very good teacher who was a concertmaster of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, Rudolf Bergman. And then in 1946 I went to Jerusalem, where I studied at the Jerusalem Academy with Josef Tal. And right after that, in 1947, I went to Europe and spent half a year helping Jewish refugees. I came back, right into the war. I was immediately mobilized, as a veteran of the *Palmach*, the special forces of the underground, the *Hagganah*. That was my extra-musical career.

Then came the war. During the war I won a scholarship to go, in 1949, to Tanglewood, and I became a pupil of Aaron Copland. I think I was one of those lucky persons who got some

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 294.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



private lessons. I stayed there about half a year and then I returned to Israel, where I got a position at the Ministry of Culture and Education as supervisor of Music Education. In 1952 I won the UNESCO Koussevitzky Prize, and I went again to the United States to further my studies with Copland. Then in 1960 I went to Brandeis University, where I got my Master of Fine Arts degree. I was a student of Irving Fine and Harold Shapero. My two earlier teachers, Ben-Haim and Josef Tal, represented two extremes--Ben-Haim, an impressionist, Tal, an expressionist. It seems that I have had a tendency towards pluralism, to which my studies in the U.S., exposing me to a variety of styles and musical thought, were a real asset.

- RF Tal and Ben-Haim were immigrants from Germany, so they shared a certain heritage and stylistic orientation.
- BO In a way, maybe. Now that you've heard the *Vigil in Jerusalem* of mine, do you find any traces?
- RF Actually, I hear an affinity with Charles Ives, in the way you use textures and densities of sound--and in the changing moods, as well as the melodic style which seems almost reminiscent of American folklorist music. But I also heard what I thought was a reference to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony near the beginning. I don't hear the close interval texture which Alexander Ringer described in your earlier works. There are melodic skips in every line, but this work was written about ten years after Professor Ringer's article. Does it represent a shift away from an earlier style?
- BO I must admit that I'm not conscious about my own stylistic changes. I'm not bothered with it at all. I think that Professor Ringer was referring mainly to the *Monologue*, a viola piece, and there it's very true.
- RF He compared it to cantillation associated with observance of the Passover Seder.
- BO Yes, there is an enormous influence of cantillation in my music, in the *Vigil in Jerusalem* too, I think. The biblical cantillation has an enormous influence, it's part of my musical language. It's mainly a melodic influence which can be traced in the harmonic textures, leaning on certain kinds of modal structures. This work is subtitled "The Third Watch," a reference to the night watches of the Old Temple which were divided into four periods. It's part of a cycle which includes three "Watches," *Songs of an Early Morning*, and *Hallel*.
- RF What does it mean to you to be an Israeli composer?
- BO For me, it enables a certain tendency. As one who intends to be part of the very definite Hebrew culture, I declare "I belong." Now, what's the meaning of belonging? It demands, first of all, an acknowledgment of a tradition, of collective memory, which manifests itself in behaviors. Belonging means the language, because the language is different than any other language, and as such serves as a bridge to tradition and its origins.
- RF So the Hebrew language as spoken--
- BO Not only as spoken, but as a tonescape. And of course, you have the panorama, the landscape, with all of the emotional layers and history that it bears. And then, the people which, as you must have noticed, are enormously varied. It's a real heterogeneous society, whose real common denominator is the language, so strongly connected to the Bible, and to the book of prayers which all congregations use many times a day. This kind of spiritual common denominator serves like a territory. I did elaborate on this in my essay which deals with the musical potentialities of the Hebrew language.<sup>25</sup>
- RF And its manifestations in your work?
- BO Yes, as far as intonations and rhythmic structures are concerned, which are very specific to the Hebrew language.
- RF Do you think of your music as a direct translation of the Hebrew language?

<sup>25</sup>See summary of Ben-Zion Orgad, "The Musical Potentialities of the Hebrew Language," in Judith Cohen, ed., *Proceedings of the World Congress on Jewish Music* (Tel Aviv: The Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature Ltd., 1982) 196-97. See also Alexander L. Ringer, "Jewish Music--Old Problems, New Dilemmas," (pp. 251-64).

- BO It's not as direct as it is with a friend of mine, a composer by the name of François-Bernard Mâche, one of Messiaen's pupils--a wonderful composer, who really tries to depict the sound qualities of language in music. But not only languages--he also does it with bird songs.
- RF **That's certainly a Messiaen influence.**
- BO Yes, I think that he tends to use similar structures. It's very interesting.
- RF **Do you then extract rhythms from the essence of the language?**
- BO Yes, exactly, and some other qualities that must have been influenced, let's say, by the biblical cantillation of the different types that we have--they are different yet connected to the same words, the same language, to a similar way of pronunciation.
- RF **Are such elements as microtones and ornamentation important characteristics?**
- BO It's not only that. It's also very definite melodic structures and very definite accentuations and stresses--phonemic structures which have a definite meaning.
- RF **I think to western ears the most striking feature of oriental chant--whether Hebrew, Indian, or Islamic--is the microtonal variability.**
- BO I can't hear it from the outside. I'm part of it.
- RF **Even given your musical training abroad?**
- BO It doesn't matter, because it serves as a built-in function.
- RF **The younger composers here seem strongly attached to western styles, but you appear to derive your sources and inspiration from your own culture. Did you escape this western influence entirely?**
- BO I'm not sure whether entirely, but I think I did, yes. I'm not writing eastern music. I'm using the western way of staging the music, western instruments and notation. I deal with words too. In the last five years I've been writing poetry, so words for me--in their meanings and sounds--are part of my expression. It's a way I communicate, though I think I still prefer music. Yes, I do.
- RF **I wasn't always able to tell whether your notation was conventionally metered.**
- BO I use conventional notation even when I tend to simultaneity. There are pieces where I do what Ives was doing, you were right about that. I, too, place different groups in the hall to play from different corners.
- RF **I read this in the score of your *Mizmorim*.**
- BO Yes, it started with that and later, in 1971, in my *Ballad for Orchestra*, which was written for Lukas Foss. Six of the brass players leave the stage--while the orchestra goes on playing--and move to the balconies, and then join in an antiphonal playing with the whole orchestra. I like this very much. In a more recent piece, *Individuations*, which is a *concertante* for chamber orchestra and clarinet solo, I have two wind trios on both sides and a trumpet in the back of the hall. That kind of interplaying, the kinetic experience of sounds moving around, interests me very much.
- I used to be a reconnaissance man, so I used to be outside in the open a lot. I know this country intimately, know it with my feet. Sounds in nature don't come from one angle, they move from all around. It's the way the sounds are coming to you, relate to you moving towards them, which is important to me--especially now when I feel that most of the audiences tend to be very passive. They sit and wait for music to come to them, without necessarily feeling a need towards it. I am trying to change that by provoking at least one question: "where does the sound come from?" It's not obvious. And then the extra magic that you get, for example, when you have a trumpet in the back, and a trumpet on stage, and they're playing one against the other. Something happens, the sound waves--you can really feel them. And for me this is really magic. And in a way, it is as if I'm trying to resist the recordings, because these things you can't record--it's impossible, not yet.
- I feel myself as if I'm always on a search. I came close to the poetry of Paul Celan, a Jewish poet from Chernowitz who went through the Holocaust, and ended up as a professor in Paris. He is considered one of the great poets in German, at least in the second half of this century. He committed suicide in 1970. I was reading his poetry in German, and noticed how he succeeded to deal with the time element. His poetry actually forms its own time. When I read poetry, I hear it in my ears. The awareness of the way he captures time and molds it with contents has not only been a guide and sensor to my translations of some of his poems into Hebrew, but has been serving me, quite consciously, in my composing.

I feel that one of the problems of what is done in contemporary music is the relation to what Susanne Langer calls "the articulated form," which enables you to relate simultaneously to the whole, and to the particles in that whole--while achieving the right balance between the materials and duration. What happens to most music which has been, and is being, composed in our century is that the particles tend to be so strong that they stick out from the overall articulated form.

RF And one cannot tell the gestures from the events?

BO The events--the moments are more important than the captivity of time. My trying to find that kind of balance started with the poetry of Paul Celan--yes, and with his voice too. I have a recording of a recital he gave in 1968 in Jerusalem. Listen to it, it's very interesting, the music of it. It has nothing to do with the understanding of the meaning of the words. It's the meaning of the sound that really prevails.

RF I could hear recurring patterns of stanzas overlapping, apparently the last line becomes the first. And always the immediate repetition with the *ritardando*.

BO Right, but then the overall--on a purely sonic level. It's very strange to me. One evening I was reading this poetry--in the morning, when I woke up, I heard a whole poem of his as if it was conceived in Hebrew and I wrote it down. It's the accentuations, you see, it's basically iambic meter, always with the stress toward the end. He uses the German in the same manner, and he combines words too, to get a similar effect. And that line of that poem he has, which started like "*Du sei wie du, immer*"--for me, in Hebrew, is "*Ha'yi asher, tehi, tamid*"--the very same. He knew Hebrew, he grew up with Hebrew. He was a multi-linguist, like many Jews in Chernowitz. The way he reads stresses it even more.

Now let me dwell a little on the captivity of time, which in our instance relates to volume of time, to intensity of time, to qualities of time and to the ability of sounding text to form them. Almost any start arouses expectations--it evokes many possibilities to be anticipated. And when slowly, slowly, the number of anticipations narrows until you are left with one only, that should be the end. This overall shape, as perceived, with the connection to its comprised moments, can be found in Bach's music, and in the way he deals with these elements is an ideal I long for. I don't have to tell you how difficult it is to work on moments, and while you do it bear the overall shape in your mind.

RF Schoenberg said that the composer must have a vision of the whole before working out the details of a composition.

BO Yes, and like Hindemith, who believes that one could perceive a symphony of Brahms the way he perceives a city's skyline, in one second of lightning. But it is not the one second that counts for me. No, for me it's more the approach of Hume or the Hindu, for whom time is a succession of moments.

RF You seem to be suggesting the kind of organic unity that Schoenberg spoke about in Fundamentals of Musical Composition--how music, like any work of art, should be an organic whole with parts that function like a body's parts function.

BO Yes, but this approach invites a formal attitude. It may lead one to prefer a certain "series," or a certain "row," to insure that a piece won't fall apart over the choice of materials.

RF But the method is still separate from the idea behind the piece, the idea which is the vision of the whole.

BO It is so, if you have an objective, which is above, or behind, or in front of the piece.

RF So that there is nothing that doesn't belong. It's all part of this, because it is a time experience.

BO Right, this interests me--this and simultaneity.

RF Did the music of Ives influence you to use simultaneity?

BO No, I reached it long after knowing his music. I think it started with *Miznorim*, in which I allowed different texts from different Psalms to run together. They complemented or contradicted each other quite dramatically, thus enabling me to establish tensions and releases which suited my approach to the familiar, often used chants. By joining various sound layers into one musical expression, I have tried to achieve a certain plenitude. That was my way to simultaneity in music.

- RF You were telling me earlier about the pluralistic qualities--the multi-lingual, heterogeneous aspect of Israeli culture. I can easily see how Israel could itself provide a backdrop for simultaneity in composition.
- BO It's not only this kind of multi-ness, it's more.
- RF The old and new--in Jerusalem, where a new building can be next to, or on top of something thousands of years old--that could lead you to think of simultaneity.
- BO A friend of mine guides tours in Jerusalem--"sound tours." On Friday they go to the Muslims, on Saturday to the Jews, on Sunday to the Christians, to listen to the various ethnic and liturgical musics. At the end of the tour, while still in the old city--she takes them, before sunrise, at three in the morning--the third watch--on to a roof, where she plays a recording of my Vigil in Jerusalem. I receive reports that the sounds of my music intermingle quite naturally with cocks' crows, church bells, as well as with resoundings of previous experiences--a sensation quite gratifying for me.

A cease-fire now declared, Benzi telephoned from New York to say goodbye before returning to Israel. During his visit, someone inquired as to his expectations concerning the future of the Middle East. Citing a traditional Jewish reluctance toward predictions in general, he expressed his hope that the future might bring the possibility of a federation of all nations in the region, including Israel--a kind of "united states" of the Middle East. This reply took me entirely by surprise. But now, in the immediate aftermath of a war which saw Israel and some of its neighbors threatened by a common adversary, the notion may seem to hold some small measure of promise.

Recalling the preceding weeks and months of televised news coverage from the Persian Gulf, one brief bit of footage stands out in my memory--that of violinist Isaac Stern performing alone on stage in Israel, in the midst of an air raid, before a sea of faces concealed behind gas masks. This scene, echoing earlier moments in the history of this young nation, attests to the extraordinary place of music in the lives of Israelis. Frank Pelleg, a prominent musician of the early decades in Israel, recounted a similar scene from the dawn of the nation:

I remember the day after the proclamation of the State of Israel. The unprepared and--then--defenceless [sic] citizens of Tel Aviv were exposed to incessant, murderous air raids, and the radio had announced the first casualties. But there was not a single empty seat at the regular subscription concert of the Philharmonic Orchestra. Earlier still, during the fighting on the border with Jaffa, a Bach recital had to wage a desperate battle with the clatter of the machineguns around the Municipal Museum, and the large audience, ordered to wait for the "All clear" to disperse, were granted a repeat of the programme, item by item, as an encore. It would be a mistake to assume these undaunted music-lovers ready to risk their lives for a sonata were adventurous young people enjoying the blackout and the alarms and excursions as a welcome additional thrill. They were mostly elderly people. They were the same "Herr Doktors" and "Frau Professors" for whom, over there and for generations, membership of a music society used to mean as much as the privilege of voting or the necessity to slave. It was mainly they who for 27 years helped to keep up the weekly chamber music concerts in Tel Aviv. Other cities and villages followed their example.<sup>26</sup>

The first generation Israeli composers presented here are generally representative of this community. But whereas most of their Central European compatriots have leaned musically toward the past, these composers have by necessity always lived in, and responded to the present. Nonetheless, in a society which, according to Pelleg, did "not respond enthusiastically to local talent,"<sup>27</sup> all have achieved widespread recognition and acclaim, as individual voices conveying important aspects of both their own culture and of our contemporary lives. Closing the final session of Ben-Zion Orgad's visit to NIU, with student and faculty composers, Jan Bach spoke for all those assembled, expressing that all of our thoughts go with him, together with our strongest wishes for peace.

<sup>26</sup>Frank Pelleg, "Listening to Music in Israel," *Ariel* 6 (1963): 24-25. Bohlman (see footnote 6) provides a thorough and vivid description of this Central European Jewish community, the development of its musical culture, and its continuation in Israel.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.